



Developmental Overviews

Shetland Guidance Note

Developmental overviews have been refreshed by a multi-agency group of professionals from a variety of services within Shetland. This follows work originally undertaken by Highland Council. The collaborative approach has allowed professionals to share their insights and expertise. A multi-agency perspective also facilitates early identification of any areas of concern around a child's development. The information from developmental overviews can be used to support universal and targeted approaches.

Developmental overviews and guidance can be found on NHS Shetland's Speech and Language Therapy website under the 'Early Years Toolkit'. [Early Years Toolkit – NHS Shetland](#)

The term 'practitioners' refers to all staff working in an early learning and childcare setting.

Please note: The guidance and overviews are working documents which may be updated.

Purpose of Developmental Overviews

Developmental overviews are a valuable tool for observing and supporting children's developmental milestones. Developmental overviews are snapshots that help practitioners understand a child's current stage of development and to plan appropriate next steps. The overviews are **not** diagnostic tools.

By observing and recording developmental progress, practitioners can identify progress and areas where a child may need additional support.

Developmental overviews should help to provide a holistic picture of a child's development. The overviews should also support discussions between home, early learning and childcare settings and if required, other professionals and to support transition to school.

Information from the overviews should be used to reflect and plan for high quality interactions, experiences and spaces within early learning and childcare settings.

Content of Overviews

There are three developmental overviews:

- 2-3 year old developmental overview
- 3-4 year old developmental overview
- 4-5 year old developmental overview

Each overview is divided into different columns. The statements in each column have been developed with professionals.



The columns are:

- Movement
- Co-ordination
- Routines
- Social and Emotional
- Play and Imagination
- Understanding Language
- Using Language

Child Development

Child development is a unique process, with each child progressing at their own pace. These developmental milestones provide a general guide for children's progress however, it is important to recognise that each child may reach these milestones at different times.

Realising the Ambition, page 23, states:

“Development is not a race or an endurance contest. We will always be doing the right thing if we are aware of each child's development and are providing interactions and opportunities that match the needs of the child. We also need to be mindful of the fundamental role of the parent or carer as the caregiver and as the child's first educator.”

Using the Developmental Overviews

When a child transitions to the setting, practitioners should spend at least 4 weeks getting to know the child through observing and playing and talking together.

Developmental overviews outline the typical stages of child development. However, for some children, it may be appropriate to use an overview for a different age group. In some cases, it may not be appropriate to use columns in the overviews and for some, the overview may not be the most appropriate tool for observation and planning. In both circumstances, it is essential to have a discussion with ELC managers to ensure the most appropriate approach.

The skills on the overviews should be observed through natural adult/child interactions, playing and talking together. There is no need to set up specific tasks/activities for children to complete for a skill to be observed. For some skills, information may be gathered from home or elsewhere for example, if there are no pedal bikes and trikes in the setting.



Completing the Developmental Overviews

Early learning and childcare settings should complete the developmental overviews collaboratively through professional dialogue together.

Developmental overviews are a working document and should be used on an ongoing basis. The key is not to overthink the skill statements. Use your observational skills and ongoing professional dialogue to make informed judgements.

There are 4 colour categories to use when completing the developmental overviews. These are:

- Not yet known (white) – not yet observed.
- **Emerging** (yellow) – child is developing this skill. Not yet secure.
- **Secure** (green) – child consistently demonstrates this skill.
- **Area of concern** (blue) – skill not yet developed and there are concerns around how to support the child in developing the skill/s, despite having tried universal strategies.

Once the colour code has been identified, write the date in the corresponding box and highlight the relevant colour.

For example:

MOVEMENT
Runs on tiptoes and/or heels when asked. E.g. follow the leader, sneaking up on people.
27/11/2024
09/02/2025

Areas of Concern

It is essential that the ELC manager and parents and carers are part of any discussion regarding areas of concern for a child. Be professional and mindful of sensitive and supportive communication – put yourself in the parent/carer's shoes. Developing positive relationships is key to this.

The following guidance may be considered:

- Access the developmental overview version with supporting links for further information and additional strategies/resources. [Early Years Toolkit – NHS Shetland](#)
- As a staff team, identify strategies from the developmental overview version with supporting links that could be used to support the child.
- Give the child time and a variety of opportunities to develop skills. Ensure parents have been consulted about whether the skills have been observed at home.
- Note all strategies and interventions that have been implemented with dates and observations.
- Through discussions with the ELC manager, parents and carers, decide if a request for a consultation with a member of the Education Outreach Service ([Education Outreach Group – Shetland Islands Council](#)) or a request for assistance from other agencies should be considered ([Allied Health Request for Assistance](#)).



Using the Information

Practitioners will gather the information on an ongoing basis and use this to identify an individual child's strengths and consider ways to support child development. This may include:

- Considering whether there are opportunities for a child to demonstrate specific skills in the setting.
- Reflecting on the environment and resources available and adjusting where necessary.
- Planning focused observations.
- Using the information to inform planning.

Developmental overviews will be used to support the transition process either when a child transitions to another setting or when a child transitions to school. The overviews will support child-centred transition conversations.

"There is no quick fix to issues of communication or emotional behavioural challenges. It is important not to jump to conclusions or think there is an answer to every issue. The most important thing for us to do is to respond to every child in a unique way with respect and build strong relationships as outlined earlier in this section." Realising the Ambition, page 40.

Frequently Asked Questions

When do we have to start using the refreshed documents?

These should be in use from August 2025.

A child has a medical need and/or an identified additional support need, should the developmental overviews still be used?

It is recommended that this is discussed with the ELC manager to identify which aspects of the overview are relevant for the individual child.

Why are some statements the same across different overviews?

This is intentional as some skills children acquire may regress. It is important we continue to monitor these.

Can we have access to an editable version?

To ensure consistency, there is no access to an editable version.



Can we provide feedback or suggest changes?

Yes – please email the ELC inbox: ELC@shetland.gov.uk

Developed in collaboration with:

Shetland

Early Learning and Childcare Central Team, Educational Psychology Service, Pre-School Home Visiting Service, NHS Speech and Language Therapy Team, NHS Children and Young People, Occupational Therapy Team, NHS Children's Physiotherapy Team, Sound Early Learning and Childcare Team, Lerwick Early Learning and Childcare Team.

Highland

Educational Psychology Service.